

**5/13/22 Friday**

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**'Not Favorable': Erdogan Opposes Letting Sweden, Finland into NATO**

The swift accession of two Scandinavian states to the North Atlantic alliance could hit a snag, as a key member's opposition would disrupt the unanimity by which the mutual defense bloc governs its membership.

"We are following developments concerning Sweden and Finland, but we are not of a favorable opinion," Turkish President Recep Tayyip [Erdogan told reporters](#) on Friday.

The Turkish leader explained he did not want to repeat Turkey's "mistake" when it agreed to readmit its regional rival Greece in 1980, which he said had allowed Athens "to take an attitude against Turkey by taking NATO behind it."

He in particular cited [Sweden's support for Kurdish](#) groups, including the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which Ankara considers a terrorist group.

"Scandinavian countries have become a safe haven, a so-called guest house for PKK and other terror groups," Erdogan said. "Some terrorists even participate in Sweden's and the Netherlands' parliaments."

Although Finland and Sweden are militarily non-aligned states, they have long had a relationship with NATO providing for various forms of military cooperation and joint training. While some on the right have looked to NATO for additional security in the wake of the launching of Russia's [special operation in Ukraine](#), many left-wing parties in both countries strongly oppose military alignment.

Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde, for example, has claimed that "an armed attack on Sweden cannot be ruled out," ignoring the specific reasons behind the special operation, including the genocidal eight-year-long war against Russian-speaking minorities in the Donbass region. It is also worth noting that [Swedish defense leaders](#) have made this [claim for years](#), justifying a [40% increase in Stockholm's](#) defense budget in 2020.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has encouraged their application, saying the accession procedure could be completed in "a couple of weeks," although it's likely for the entire process to take at least six months. Their [applications are expected](#) before the month is out. Based in Brussels, Belgium, the alliance is composed of 30 member states bound together by a mutual defense pact. It was formed in 1949 by a handful of Western European capitalist states to present a united front against the Soviet Union and the several allied socialist states that formed in Central and Eastern Europe after the end of World War 2. After the overthrow of those socialist governments and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the now-unrivaled NATO began spreading eastward, adding the new capitalist governments to the alliance in violation of [agreements reached with Russia](#) that NATO would not expand further east than a reunified Germany.

By early 2022, four NATO states that shared borders with Russia and Ukraine, governed by a pro-Western nationalist government brought to power by a US-backed coup, were pleading for

NATO membership. Moscow has said that Ukrainian NATO membership is a security red line and would pose a threat to Russia, and after negotiations aimed at geopolitically neutralizing Kiev failed, a special operation to accomplish the task was launched on February 24, 2022. Russian diplomats repeated similar warnings at news of Finland's NATO application "The latest expansion of NATO will not make our continent more stable and secure", Kremlin spokesperson [Dmitri Peskov told reporters](#) on Thursday. He added that the further [strengthening of NATO's](#) eastern flank would "become an element for a special analysis and the development of the necessary measures to balance the situation and ensure our security." "Everything will depend on how the expansion process will manifest itself in the future, how far military infrastructure will move closer to our borders", Peskov stressed. Oleg Stepanov, Russia's [ambassador to Canada, told Sputnik](#) that if they joined the US-led alliance, "Finland and Sweden will be put in a position where they are forced to treat Russia as an adversary. Reciprocally, Russians are to change their perception of previously neutral countries as the springboard of NATO threat." This, he said, could turn a once-peaceful region "into yet another potential theater of war."

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Damage Control: White House Urges Warning of 100 Million Covid Cases This Winter  
'Preliminary'

The White House has gone into damage control mode after one of its senior health officials gave a startlingly high estimate for potential Covid-19 cases this coming winter. Over the weekend, the White House's new coronavirus response coordinator, health scholar Dr. Ashish Jha, gave an interview in which he warned of an impending wave of 100 million cases if Congress continued to stall on approving federal funding for anti-Covid programs. "[W]e're looking at a range of models, both internal and external models. And what they're predicting is that if we don't get ahead of this thing, we're going to have a lot of waning immunity, this virus continues to evolve and we may see a pretty sizable wave of infections, hospitalizations and deaths this fall and winter," Jha told [ABC's "This Week" on May 8](#). "Whether that happens or not is largely up to us as a country. If we can prepare and if we can act, we can prevent that. But we're going to need Congress' help. And that's one of the key messages here is, we need the resources to fight that battle so we don't have that kind of fall and winter," he added. According to [the official tally by the US](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the US has only detected 82.2 million COVID-19 cases since the beginning of the pandemic. However, the health agency's infection-induced antibody seroprevalence surveys, which are based on blood tests collected across the country, have pointed to there being [almost twice the number](#) of detected cases. By Friday, the White House had still not shared any new information about the models Jha said the stark estimate had been based on.



[CNN reported that a senior](#) administration official said the data Jha cited was “preliminary” and “early,” based on data collected by modelers and experts that the White House had sought in recent weeks. The official further noted that the numbers were intended for scenario planning, not prediction.

Jha was appointed to his present position on April 1 and quickly took up the cause of securing funding for COVID-19 aid, which lawmakers [have repeatedly punted](#) in favor of passing new bills [providing Ukraine with weapons](#). The \$10 billion funding bill still sitting in Congress would increase the availability of tests, therapeutics and vaccines nationwide.

On Thursday, US President Joe Biden ordered flags to half-staff to [mark the “tragic milestone”](#) of 1 million deaths from COVID-19 in the country. The deaths have come in four distinct waves associated with massive outbreaks: the first in the spring of 2020 heralded the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic; the second over the winter of 2020-2021 was the last without vaccines; the third came in late summer and early fall of 2021 and was caused by the Delta variant of the virus; and the fourth came in the winter of 2021-2022, caused by the Omicron variant.

In June, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will [meet to determine which](#) COVID-19 strains are the most likely to cause problems later this year and order new vaccines to combat them. Developing modified shots could take two or three months, although neither Pfizer or Moderna, the two main COVID-19 vaccine suppliers in the US, have marketed targeted COVID-19 vaccines.

“If we had the resources we’d be there having those conversations today,” Jha told [the Associated Press](#) in an interview published Friday. “The window is really closing on us if we want to be in the front of the line.”

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#### Texas Supreme Court Allows Child Abuse Probes of Parents Who Affirm Trans Kids’ Genders to Resume

The Texas Supreme Court ruled on Friday to allow the state’s Child Protective Services to resume its investigations of the parents of transgender children. However, Governor Greg Abbott can no longer specifically order the agency to pursue the matter.

The Lone Star State’s high court struck down an [injunction against the Department](#) of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) that blocked it from following a [February 23 order by Abbott](#) to carry out the investigations. Abbott’s order followed a directive several days earlier by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, which stated that the state had begun regarding gender-affirming healthcare for transgender children as “child abuse.”

Under such a designation, trans children could potentially be taken from their supportive families and placed in foster care, where they would be unlikely to continue living as the gender they identify as - a situation trans people refer to as “detransitioning.” Advocates immediately sounded the alarm, calling the move an [attempt at genocide](#) and a violation of [pediatric standards of care](#).

"Trans youth, in particular, are being hounded in public and driven to deaths of despair at an alarming rate," US Assistant Secretary for Health [Rachel Levine told NPR](#) in April. Levine, who is also trans, cited [a Trevor Project study](#) finding that 52% of transgender youth in the US contemplated suicide in 2020. "Think about how many of them thought it was better to die than to put up with any more harassment, scapegoating and intentional abuse."

[In its 12-page decision](#), the Texas court blocked the investigation of the family who brought the suit, but found that the order couldn't block DFPS from further investigations based on Paxton's determination. However, the court also found that DFPS "was not compelled by law to follow" Abbott's order to focus on investigating trans children's parents, either.

Advocates said they hoped DFPS would take the off-ramp and stop investigating trans-supportive families while the policy's legality is under review.

"We hope that, with a clear determination from the Texas Supreme Court that this directive is not legally binding, that everything will go back to business as usual before this directive from Gov. Abbott came out," Currey Cook, senior counsel with Lambda Legal, an LGBTQ civil rights group, told the [Austin American-Statesman](#).

"Are they going to do that? We don't know. We hope so," he said.

Texas is just one of several US states to enact major rollbacks on LGBTQ rights recently, including a [ban on trans girls and women](#) playing on women's sports teams. Despite Paxton's decision, the state has so far failed to pass a bill banning gender-affirming medical care for trans youth [like Alabama, Arizona and Arkansas](#) have.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), [nearly 240 anti-LGBTQ bills](#) have been introduced in state legislatures in 2022 alone, including sports and healthcare bans as well as bans on trans women using women's bathrooms and on trans people's ability to change their name and gender markers on certain public documents, with several already having been passed. As a result, some [19 states have introduced plans](#) to provide legal refuge to transgender youth and their families fleeing from states enacting the bans.

A federal bill that would prohibit discrimination on account of sexuality or gender identity nationwide, the Equality Act, has remained stuck in Congress for more than a year. It quickly passed the Democrat-majority House in early 2021, but Senate Democrats have never brought it up for a vote, fearful that they would not be able to break the Republican filibuster that would block it.

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Identity of Soldier Mauled to Death by Bear in Alaska Revealed by US Army

Secretary of the Army Christine Warmouth told lawmakers last week that an armored battalion could soon be removed from Alaska and replaced with another paratrooper unit, and the 11th Airborne Division reformed.

The US Army revealed on Friday the name of the soldier who was killed by a bear in Alaska earlier this week as Staff Sgt. Seth Michael Plant, 30, of Saint Augustine, Florida.



“Staff Sgt. Plant was an integral part of our organization. He was a positive and dedicated leader who brought joy and energy to the paratroopers who served with him,” Lt. Col. David Nelson, commander of the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment, [said in a statement](#).

“His loss is deeply felt within our organization and we offer our sincere condolences to friends and family.”

Plant was mauled by a brown bear on May 10 while setting a course for a navigation exercise. He and two other soldiers were scouting an area west of the Anchorage Regional Landfill when they accidentally stumbled upon a sow and her two cubs. The mother bear attacked two of the soldiers, knocking one down and mauling Plant, before running away.

“From the soldier’s perspective, there was a flash of brown mass,” Capt. Derek DeGraaf, head of the Northern Detachment of the Alaska Wildlife Troopers, told the [New York Times](#). “They were attacked and didn’t even see it coming.”

Plant was medevaced from the scene of the attack in a National Guard helicopter and taken to the hospital on [Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson](#), where he was declared dead.

“From everything we know so far, based on the scene investigation and information from other responding agencies, this appears to be a defensive attack by a female bear protecting her cubs,” Cyndi Wardlow, a regional supervisor for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, told [Alaska Public Media](#).

The DFG told the outlet it was still looking for the bear responsible for the attack.

The northernmost US state is widely known for the wildlife that flourishes in its boreal forest, mountains and tundra, including all three types of bears seen in North America: Black, Brown and Polar.

“Even if you don’t see a bear, you will never be far from one,” the [DFG website notes](#). “Alaska is bear country.”

Still, fatal bear attacks are uncommon in The Last Frontier: before Monday’s attack, the most recent [was in September 2020](#), when a man was killed during a moose hunt in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

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Jan. 6 Panel Subpoenas GOP Leader McCarthy, Four Other Trump-Allied Congressmen  
By - Evan Craighead

The House Select Committee probing the Jan. 6 insurrection is expected to begin public hearings on June 9, beginning with a broad review of its 10-month probe. The panel will likely focus on the conduct of then-President Donald Trump and GOP officials, including whether 45 and his allies pressured the DoJ to overturn the 2020 election results.

The Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the US Capitol [on Thursday announced the issuance of subpoenas](#) to House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) and four other Trump-allied US lawmakers who have previously refused the panel’s request to voluntarily cooperate with the probe.

Reps. Jim Jordan (R-OH), Andy Biggs (R-AZ), Mo Brooks (R-AL), and Scott Perry (R-PA) were named alongside the House GOP leader.

The issuance marks the first time the 9-member panel has formally sought testimony from sitting members of Congress.

Both McCarthy and Brooks have been called to appear before the committee for their respective depositions on May 31, and Jordan has been called to testify on May 27. Their depositions will notably take place after both Perry and Biggs' testimonies on May 26.

Each GOP lawmaker subpoenaed on Thursday was [initially given the opportunity to voluntarily cooperate with the probe.](#)

"Regrettably, the individuals receiving subpoenas today have refused and we're forced to take this step to help ensure the committee uncovers facts concerning January 6th," Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), chair of the House Select Committee investigating January 6, said in a quoted statement.

"We urge our colleagues to comply with the law, do their patriotic duty, and cooperate with our investigation as hundreds of other witnesses have done."

The committee noted that it is well aware that McCarthy was in contact with then-President Trump before, during, and after the deadly insurrection. The House GOP leader was also in constant contact with the White House in the days before and after January 6, 2021.

"Mr. McCarthy also claimed to have had a discussion with the President in the immediate aftermath of the attack during which President Trump admitted some culpability for the attack," read the panel's memo.

As for Jordan, the House Select Committee believes that his communications with Trump on January 6 are extremely relevant to the investigation, as well as reports that the US lawmaker, throughout late 2020 and early 2021, was involved in meetings and discussions on how to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Per the panel, Perry was "directly involved" with efforts to corrupt the US Department of Justice and install Jeffrey Clark as acting US attorney general. The lawmaker also had a number of communications with the White House around January 6, "including allegations that Dominion voting machines had been corrupted."

Former White House personnel have identified Biggs as someone who was potentially seeking a presidential pardon from Trump to clear himself of wrongdoing following efforts to convince state officials that the 2020 presidential election was stolen.

Biggs was also allegedly involved in plans to bring demonstrators to Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021, when Electoral College votes were being certified by the US Senate and then-Vice President Mike Pence.

Brooks, who spoke at Trump's rally on January 6, encouraged demonstrators to "start taking down names and kicking ass" and has publicly recounted conversations in which Trump urged him to "rescind the election of 2020" and reinstall Trump as head of state.

"The Select Committee also has evidence that Mr. Brooks's staff met with members of Vice President Pence's staff before January 6th and conveyed the view that the Vice President does not have authority to unilaterally refuse to count certified electoral votes," the memo detailed. As of this article's publication, the 9-member panel of seven Democrats and two Republicans has obtained relevant testimony from a plethora of individuals, including Trump White House special assistant [Cassidy Hutchinson](#), Ken Klukowski—who advised ex-DoJ official Jeffrey



Clark—and Alexandra Preate, a press assistant for former White House strategist Steve Bannon, the sole individual to be brought up on federal charges related to the Jan. 6 insurrection.

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‘Communities Are Strapped’: Arizona Joins Texas in Busing Asylum Seekers From US-Mexico Border to DC

By - Evan Craighead

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) announced on Wednesday that the state has adopted a busing system to voluntarily transport asylum-seeking migrants from the southern US border to Washington, DC. The move, first implemented by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R), comes in response to the CDC’s decision to end Title 42.

Arizona’s first bus transporting asylum-seeking migrants arrived in Washington, DC, on Wednesday—two days after it departed from Yuma, Arizona, [according to the office of Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey](#).

C.J. Karamargin, Ducey’s director of communications, asserted that all 20 individuals who volunteered for the 2,500-mile (~4,000-kilometer) journey were accounted for on Wednesday and were met by non-governmental organizations “that can help them get to their ultimate destinations.”

Travelers were said to have come from Angola, Columbia, Haiti, Peru, Venezuela and Uzbekistan, and are set to be united with sponsors in Pennsylvania, Florida, New York, New Jersey, Virginia and Maine.

While it remains unclear how many asylum seekers will actually take advantage of the transportation system, Ducey’s government believes the decision is worth the extra cost.

“It pales in comparison to the stress on local resources,” Karamargin said, noting that the Biden administration will receive a final bill for the associated busing costs. “Our communities are strapped.”

Arizona is presently capable of sending two to three buses a week, transporting up to 40 asylum-seekers on each. The total cost is dependent on the number of volunteers, the official pointed out.

In March, the federal government earmarked some \$150 million of the spending bill to be released to asylum-related nonprofits. A portion of the funds is intended to be used to arrange transportation for migrants needing transportation to their sponsors in the US.

Despite the federal funds in circulation, both Arizona and Texas have decided to accelerate the process. Ducey’s effort is currently being funded by the Border Security Fund, coffers established in 2021 in partnership with the Arizona Legislature.

“To help local officials whose communities are being overwhelmed by hordes of illegal immigrants who are being dropped off by the administration, Texas is providing charter buses to send these illegal immigrants who have been dropped off by the Biden Administration to

Washington, DC,” Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced last month during a news conference along the US-Mexico border.

Texas has assembled some 900 buses for its operation, per Texas Division of Emergency Management Chief Nim Kidd. Migrants “must volunteer to be transported and show documentation” from the Department of Homeland Security.

Like Abbott, Ducey argued this week that the federal government has overwhelmed the state, as asylum seekers “are taxing the resources, stretching the resources of nongovernmental organizations, community-based organizations.”

“And this situation will only get worse if Title 42 is lifted,” the Arizona governor said of the public health policy set to expire on May 23. “We decided to step up and help alleviate the burden on our NGOs and get these folks closer to where they ultimately want to be.”

While it is unclear whether the Biden White House will actually pick up the bill for the border states’ busing programs, the administration appears supportive of states assisting in the asylum process, despite viewing it as an “unnecessary” move in the case of the Texas state authorities.

“It’s nice the state of Texas is helping them get to their final destination, as they await their outcome of their immigration proceedings and they’re all in immigration proceedings,” said White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki last month, responding to Texas’ first bus.

However, “these actions are impacting people’s jobs and the livelihoods of hardworking families in Texas and across the country,” Psaki added.

As the US grapples with a [historic surge of migrant encounters at the US-Mexico border](#), the White House has announced it has begun moving US border personnel from northern to southern stations to assist with the influx. The DHS has acknowledged that the decision to not extend Title 42 could present “significant challenges” for the federal government.

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US, UK Hope to Streamline Future Spaceflight Endeavors in Landmark Commercial Partnership  
By - Evan Craighead

The bilateral commercial spaceflight partnership comes ahead of the first satellite launch from the UK this summer. The space mission is expected to provide the MoD with an understanding of how the UK and its international partners can create a more capable, flexible, and cost-effective communication system.

US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and counterpart Grant Shapps, the UK’s Secretary of State for Transport, have inked a landmark partnership agreeing to assist one another in future spaceflight endeavors.

Officials are hopeful that the joint effort will help produce cost-effective spaceflight operations, as well as streamline the entire process.

“The move will cut down red tape and the regulatory burden to operators resulting in greater efficiencies and a reduction in costs, resources and duplication while maintaining stringent safety standards,” per the memo.



The US-UK counterparts signed the agreement on May 11, and formally announced the partnership via news release on May 13.

“Commercial space travel is growing swiftly and it’s our responsibility to ensure that these innovations advance safely, encouraging them to develop in ways that benefit us all,” Buttigieg said in a quoted statement published by the UK.

Shapps also touted the positive impact of the “transformational partnership,” highlighting that the UK is already developing seven spaceports across the country, “injecting billions into our economy while offering high-skilled jobs.”

“As we look beyond the UK’s first planned spaceflight later this year, I look forward to seeing the innovations and opportunities skyrocket thanks to this collaboration,” said the UK Secretary of State for Transport, referring to the upcoming Prometheus-2 mission from Spaceport Cornwall in Newquay, England.

Prometheus-2, a collaboration between the UK and international partners such as the US National Reconnaissance Office, seeks to deliver two Cubesats to low Earth orbit (around 550 kilometers [342 miles] above the Earth) via Virgin Orbit’s two-stage orbital launch vehicle, LauncherOne.

The LauncherOne vehicle will be assisted by a modified Boeing 747 jet dubbed Cosmic Girl. It was revealed earlier this week that Cubesat 1 is set to include a laser detector, GPS receiver, and hyperspectral imager, allowing the miniature satellite to potentially find nearby objects or identify materials.

“The hyperspectral imager will capture multiple slivers of pictures over different wavelengths of light for higher definition images,” detailed the UK MoD in a [May 10 memo on the summer launch](#). “The GPS receiver confirms the precise time and position of the satellite over the area of the Earth to be photographed.”

As for Cubesat 2, the miniaturized satellite is equipped with two optical imaging cameras, a laser range finder, and a GPS receiver. One of its cameras will reportedly be fitted with a wide-angle lens to provide a 180-degree view of Earth’s surface, while the other camera will observe Cubesat 1, providing support for space situational awareness.

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FAA Says Boeing’s 787 Certification Docs Are Incomplete, Stoking Concerns of Further Delivery Delays

By - Evan Craighead

Deliveries of Boeing 787 Dreamliners have been delayed for more than a year amid comprehensive inspections within the production line as well as the supply chain. A Boeing spokesperson told reporters earlier this week that delays will persist as the company holds “transparent discussions” with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) officials.

FAA regulators are requesting additional data from Boeing following its submission of documentation seeking the transportation agency’s approval to resume deliveries of 787 Dreamliners, [Reuters reported Friday, citing two individuals familiar with the matter](#).

A source insisted that the FAA's concerns regarding 787 data do not automatically correlate to new delays in deliveries.

However, the transportation agency [pointed out earlier this year](#) that it reserves the right to withhold airworthiness certificates until the agency is assured "Boeing's quality control and manufacturing processes consistently produce 787s that meet FAA design standards."

The document in question was submitted to the FAA in late April, with [Boeing President and CEO Dave Calhoun touting the move](#) as an "important step" in its comprehensive review of the Dreamliner. Boeing will have the opportunity to resubmit certification documents upon correcting a number of omissions reportedly identified by the agency.

Boeing claims to prioritize "quality, stability, and supply chain capacity" in its approach.

"Safety drives the pace of our reviews," an FAA spokesperson told Reuters in response to Friday's news. The rep declined to expound on the topic.

Emirates, the world's largest airline, called out Boeing on Wednesday, stressing that structural flaws have pushed the timeline for 787 deliveries to at least 2024.

"The 787 was supposed to be delivered in 2023. Now we know for sure that's not going to happen in 2023. It may not happen even in 2024 because Boeing still haven't recommenced that production," said Adel Al Redha, chief operating officer of the major airline.

Nevertheless, sources with the planemaker have told Reuters that deliveries are expected to resume in the second half of 2022, which begins in less than two months.

"We are completing comprehensive inspections across 787 production and within the supply chain, while holding detailed, transparent discussions with the FAA, suppliers and our customers," [a Boeing spokesperson told the outlet](#) prior to the US regulator's request for additional data.

Boeing reported in February that it had accrued some \$3.5 billion in associated delivery delay costs, including customer concessions. Another \$1 billion was said to be linked to necessary production costs on the jet.

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House Judiciary Panel to Hold Hearing on 'Implications' of SCOTUS Overturning Roe v. Wade  
By - Evan Craighead

On Wednesday, Senate Republicans and West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin blocked the initiation of cloture on the Democratic-led Women's Health Protection Act, a bill seeking to codify the right to abortion into law ahead of the anticipated SCOTUS decision to overturn the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision.

As US lawmakers trumpet their respective positions on [abortion](#) amid [last week's SCOTUS leak](#), the House Judiciary Committee intends to hold a hearing May 18 regarding the potential implications of the high court overturning its landmark decision that protects a pregnant woman's liberty to elect to have an abortion without excessive government restriction.

The hearing is scheduled to take place at 10:00 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time.



Rep. Hank Johnson (D-GA), chair of the Judiciary subcommittee on courts, argued that GOP lawmakers have yet to analyze how SCOTUS overturning the 1973 decision could have unintended consequences for non-traditional child-rearing methods, such as in vitro fertilization. "Congress needs to examine the ramifications of the decision, the effects that it will have on the people of the country, and it's going to be an ongoing process," Johnson said, [as reported by NBC News](#).

During a brief interview on Friday, Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY), chair of the House Judiciary Committee, emphasized that the congressional committee is keeping an open mind in examining the potential implications of the high court carrying out such a decision.

"What are the implications? What are all the implications? I think we know a lot of them but what are all the implications?" posed the House Judiciary chair.

While the matter is rooted in women's reproductive health, it also impacts young girls capable of carrying children, highlighted Rep. Madeleine Dean (D-PA), asserting that Wednesday's hearing will "expose the extremism of this leaked opinion" - referring to SCOTUS Justice Sam Alito's leaked majority draft opinion.

Dean, who sits on the House Judiciary committee and co-chairs the bipartisan Women's Caucus, argued that Alito's leaked opinion "is literally undoing 50 years of precedent and signaling that they will go after other privacy rights."

"No one is safe," she added.

The planned House committee hearing comes just two days after the US Senate failed to implement a preemptive measure that calls for the codification of abortion rights. Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV), considered a moderate Democrat, was the only lawmaker to break rank along the 49-51 vote earlier this week.

Nadler, in response to Wednesday's vote, [proclaimed that legal abortion access is](#) "fundamental to women's health, equality, autonomy, and personal liberty." Furthermore, the rollback of Roe v. Wade could be a slippery slope toward the undoing of all Americans' "right to make their one decisions about their bodies, their lives, and their futures," tweeted the House Judiciary chair. The US Senate on Monday unanimously voted in favor of the 'Supreme Court Police Parity Act,' a bill introduced by Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) that calls for the permittance of security for SCOTUS families.

Meanwhile, amid reports of pro-abortion activists targeting Supreme Court clerks and their families, Rep. Greg Stanton (D-AZ) introduced the 'Supreme Court Families Security Act' (HR7712), which seeks to allow the Marshal of the Supreme Court to authorize and assign security for the immediate families of SCOTUS justices, as well as court clerks and other employees.

Cornyn has publicly chided Stanton's legislative effort, suggesting the congressman's "partisan bill" effectively "ignores the good faith work that was being done here in the Senate to build consensus and expands this legislation to include divisive provisions, like potentially extending police protection to the very person who leaked the draft opinion." [Stanton and Nadler have rejected accusations of partisan motivations](#).

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## US Milk Banks See Uptick in Donations as Biden Admin Dodges Accountability

By - Evan Craighead

Infant formula has become a hot and rare commodity as pharmacies and supermarkets across the US are reporting critically low inventories that are being gouged by stockpilers and panic buyers. The shortage has become a compounded issue, amid a combination of supply chain disruptions, recalls, and a factory shutdown.

While there is no shortage of negatives to the US' baby formula shortage, at least one redeeming quality of the ongoing saga appears to be the increase in traffic to milk banks accepting breast milk from mothers. Companies generally screen, test, and pasteurize the milk before it can be fed to infants, including premature babies.

"It's interesting the first sort of response that we got was from potential donors — so people responding to the formula shortage with sort of an amazing, compassionate response of how can I be part of the solution?" Deborah Youngblood, executive director of Mothers' Milk Bank Northeast in Massachusetts, [told the Associated Press](#).

According to Youngblood, around 30 individuals inquired about the facility's services because they were unable to find their child's usual formula on local shelves.

The same can be said in Missouri, where The Milk Bank is collecting donations via drop-off locations like Amer Sky Salon.

"We have been receiving so many calls that we're actually in a pause right now," Jamie Lueders, owner of the Shrewsbury salon, [told KSDK](#) this week. "Hopefully we can make better strides in really providing moms with the resources that they need."

Health officials have highlighted that parents who do not exclusively feed their children breast milk should explore their options on store shelves, as those available for purchase have been regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and—in most cases—are safe for infants.

However, experts advise against attempting to recreate the specific mix of salts, sugars, and minerals found in formulas.

"If your child is over six months of age, it's ok to start them on water, complimentary foods like pureed foods, and once your child is able to chew and swallow little pieces of foods, making sure that they are soft and about the size of the tip of your finger," Mercy Hospital's Dr. Maya Moore told KDSK.

From supermarkets to social media, the formula shortage has panicked parents stockpiling the scarce good, but it also has Hollywood elders—like 76-year-old Bette Midler—acting out.

The actress was taken to class by men and women on Friday after suggesting that women who feed their children formula should consider giving the baby breast milk.

"I love you Bette, but this is not okay. I fought to breastfeed my son, he kept losing weight, despite my best efforts, including lactation experts," tweeted user [@Mom2boy\\_pup\\_cat](#) in response to Midler. "It was emotional and ❤️ I felt like a failure and at 3 months switched to formula, because of the stress it put on me and my son."

Three percent of American companies control more than 90% of the formula market, according to MSNBC host Stephanie Ruhle.



The shortage, which has been dated back to 2020, has worsened in recent months due to a safety recall by formula maker Abbott Laboratories, which also shut down a factory earlier this year.

On Friday, the White House touted that Abbott had committed to offering rebates on formula. Aside from expanding WIC, the Biden administration has offered little assistance amid the shortage.

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**'Racially-Motivated Hate Crime': Ten Killed, Three Injured in Buffalo Shooting, Suspect Charged**  
**By - Evan Craighead**

Around 2:49 p.m. EDT, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz tweeted that the public should avoid Tops Market on Jefferson Street in Buffalo, New York, as police were responding to the scene of an active shooting event with multiple victims.

A suspected gunman is in police custody after officers with New York's Buffalo Police Department (BPD) were called to the 1200 block of Jefferson Avenue Saturday afternoon, according to the department's official Twitter page.

At least ten people were killed and another three individuals were injured. One of those killed was the store's security guard, a retired cop who shot at the alleged assailant during the massacre. Four of the 13 individuals shot were store employees.

The suspect, identified by police as 18-year-old white male Payton Gendron, was not a Buffalo resident and allegedly traveled hours to commit the mass shooting, which was livestreamed via Twitch. His name was not immediately released to the press.

Officials held a same-day arraignment of the alleged assailant on first-degree murder charges. He has entered in a plea of not guilty and is being held without bail. The case will be going before a grand jury, with the next court proceeding being set for May 19.

Additional murder charges as well as terrorism charges are expected to follow suit as the investigation unfolds. The FBI is also carrying out a parallel hate crimes investigation with state partners.

Speaking at a news conference, Erie County Sheriff John Garcia referred to the mass shooting as a "straight-up racially-motivated hate crime."

Eyewitness Grady Lewis told CNN that he saw the alleged gunman donning what appeared to be military fatigues and a bulletproof vest when he entered the supermarket and opened fire.

"He was fully prepared and ready to go," Lewis said of the alleged gunman.

Witnesses at the scene have said that it seemed as if the perpetrator was trying to let off as many rounds as possible. Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia revealed to reporters that two officers had convinced the suspect of lowering his firearm shortly after arriving on the scene. The alleged gunman later surrendered himself to authorities without issue.

"The death of pain that families are feeling and that all of us are feeling cannot be explained," Mayor Byron Brown said during a same-day news conference.

"I am closely monitoring the shooting at a grocery store in Buffalo. We have offered assistance to local officials," [tweeted New York Governor Kathy Hochul](#). "If you are in Buffalo, please avoid the area and follow guidance from law enforcement and local officials."

Investigators are looking into reports that the alleged gunman left behind a 106-page online manifesto that claimed he was motivated by a conspiracy theory stating that "White birth rates must change," as white people are being replaced by other races.

Jefferson Avenue is regarded as a majority Black community in east Buffalo.

Authorities are looking into pursuing a possible hate crime charge after the BPD is joined by state and federal law enforcement agencies, according to a top law enforcement official who spoke with WGRZ. Per authorities, 11 of the 13 victims were Black.

US President Joe Biden has been briefed on the incident and has issued a [statement](#) condemning the events.

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Videos: Thousands Gather Nationwide for 'Ban Off Our Bodies' Protest in Support of Roe v. Wade

By - Evan Craighead

Saturday's 'Ban Off Our Bodies' protest, organized in part by the Women's March, was slated to attract up to 17,000 individuals to the National Mall in Washington, DC, according to a permit approved by the National Park Service. More than 380 same-day demonstrations were scheduled across the US in support of upholding the 1973 abortion decision.

Thousands of abortion rights advocates took to Washington, DC, on May 14 to assemble in protest against the leaked majority draft opinion—a document authored by SCOTUS Justice Samuel Alito that appeared to show that he was joined by Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch, Clarence Thomas, and Brett Kavanaugh in voting to overturn Roe v. Wade.

Demonstrators toting 'Bans Off Our Bodies' signs met at the National Mall and began marching to the US Supreme Court building around 2:00 p.m. EDT on Saturday. The event wrapped by 4 p.m.

"I think that women should have the right to choose what to do with their bodies and their lives. And I don't think banning abortion will stop abortion. It just makes it unsafe and can cost a woman her life," Caitlin Loehr, a 34-year-old protester told the Association Press.

Some demonstrators were seen wearing shirts emblazoned with the phrase: "Our bodies, our futures, our abortions."

The possibility of the 49-year-old federal decision being overturned also brought out anti-abortion advocates who organized their own counter-protest outside the high court.

However, the nation's capital was not the only site of pro-choice demonstrations, as more than 380 separate demonstrations were planned across the country, [according to USA Today](#).

In New York, where thousands of abortion advocates marched across the Brooklyn Bridge and into Manhattan, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) appeared a bit out-of-touch with his NYC constituents.



Schumer “has the nerve to show up at #BansOffOurBodies and tell us to ‘keep marching.’ New Yorkers tell him to stop marching, go back to DC, and get something done,” [tweeted Sarah Taitz](#).

In addition to support from Women's March, sponsors of the nationwide demonstrations included Planned Parenthood Action Fund, UltraViolet, MoveOn, the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Abortion Rights Action League.

Since the leak, Democratic lawmakers in Congress have attempted to codify abortion rights into law, but have failed to make headway on the issue since it failed to reach cloture in the US Senate.

Additionally, [the House Judiciary Committee has announced its intent to hold a hearing](#) on Wednesday, May 18, regarding the potential implications of the high court overturning abortion—a move that Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen believes will have a lasting impact on society.

“I believe that eliminating the right of women to make decisions about when and whether to have children would have very damaging effects on the economy and would set women back decades,” Yellen said on Tuesday, responding to a question posed by Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ).

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Race-Based Buffalo Shooting Prompts Renewed Calls for US Gun Reform  
By - Evan Craighead

It would appear congressional work on gun reform legislation has become the new knee-jerk “thoughts and prayers,” as Democratic lawmakers’ calls for stricter gun control have failed to bring about the “transformative” change promised by the Biden administration ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

The recent hate-based mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, has renewed some Democratic US lawmakers’ calls for “common sense” firearm safety and more support for gun reform legislation that has historically failed to fulfill the 60-vote filibuster threshold required in the US Senate.

“I ache for the victims and their families. I ache for Buffalo. I ache for the tight-knit East Side community,” tweeted [Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer \(D-NY\)](#), speaking of the majority Black neighborhood targeted by the alleged gunman. “Racism has no place in our state or our country.”

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), a 2020 contender for the Democratic presidential nomination, also expressed her condolences and once again called on her congressional colleagues to “do more to address the scourge of racism” and “pass commonsense [sic] gun safety measures to keep our communities safe.”

Gillibrand has previously introduced gun reform legislation, such as the [Hadiya Pendleton and Nyasia Pryear-Yard Gun Trafficking and Crime Prevention Act](#), a bill first introduced in 2019 that sought to decrease the number of illegal weapons on the streets by establishing the trafficking of guns across state lines as a federal crime.

Back in September 2021, [Gillibrand stated](#) that it was “really easy to purchase an illegal weapon” when criminals are trafficking across states operating with different gun laws. The bill would permit someone to be jailed for up to 25 years if convicted of running a gun trafficking ring.

“And we know about 70% of the weapons used in crimes in New York state come from out of state and most of those weapons are illegal,” Gillibrand said.

March For Our Lives, a student-led organization in support of gun control legislation, said that the actions carried out by the 18-year-old suspect exemplify the position that guns have gotten into the wrong hands and current US gun legislation “empowers this white supremacist violence.”

“The victims of the Buffalo shooting deserved a society that truly values their lives,” [the group tweeted](#). “Allowing this endless violence to go unchecked is a choice—a shameful choice that our country makes every day.”

Buffalo shooting suspect Payton Gendron, an 18-year-old resident of Conklin, New York, has been arraigned on a first-degree murder charge—the highest in the state—in relation to the livestreamed mass shooting that claimed the lives of 10 individuals and has a clear “racial component,” per Erie County District Attorney John Flynn.

Of the 13 people shot by Gendron, who is white, 11 of them were said to be Black.

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I'll Charge You a Fine And Your Little Dog Too! US City Adopts Law Limiting How Long Pups Can Bark

By - Mary Manley

The city of Aurora, Illinois, is located in the Chicago metropolitan area and is the state's second-largest city after Chicago. Located in Kane County with a population of roughly 200,000 people, the dense suburban area has just passed a law that is sure to keep cat owners happy: a new “excessive noise” law for dogs.

Dog owners in Aurora may end up paying more money to the city if they have noisy dogs after city officials approved a new law that will now limit how long dogs are allowed to bark.

This week, the Aurora City Council revised an animal control ordinance that limiting the amount of animals that can be owned per household, as well as restrict how long a dog can bark during the day.

The new [ordinance](#) will limit residents to only four pets per household, and only two pets from the same species are allowed within a single household— this includes ferrets, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, as well as farm animals— unless otherwise approved by the city's animal control agency.

Those already owning multiple pets before the new ordinance will not be affected under the new rules' grandfather clause.



[Aurorans](#) will also be charged a fine of \$100 if their dog barks for more than 15 consecutive minutes between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. local time and for more than 10 minutes from 10:01 p.m. to 6:59 p.m. local time.

But first, neighbors who wish to report the barking or yapping will have to show evidence by making a recording or supporting their claim with multiple witnesses.

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Missing Picasso Painting Spotted in Home of Imelda Marcos, Former First Lady of the Philippines

By - Mary Manley

On May 9, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. won a landslide victory in the Philippines' presidential elections. But despite more than 30 million Filipinos voting for the son of the former dictator who controlled the Philippines for two decades, stealing \$10 billion from his people, speculation surrounding the family's ill-gotten wealth is now resurfacing.

A missing Pablo [Picasso](#) painting was seen at the home of Marcos Sr.'s widow, Imelda Marcos. Images released by the Marcos family show the painting hanging in the background while Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. hugs his mother following his victorious win on Monday. The painting is suspected to be a missing work by the Spanish painter known for co-founding the Cubist movement. Images show the painting, "Femme Couchée VI" (Reclining Woman VI), hanging above an ornate settee in Imelda's living room.

Though the painting could be a fake, its display adds tension to those who are already worried that Marcos Jr.'s win will mark a return to the days when the Philippines was being controlled by a greedy dictator.

Not only did [Marcos Sr.](#) abuse the civil rights of his citizens and lead a vicious police force while placing the country under martial law for half of his reign, but the Marcos regime was also severely corrupt. The Marcos family allegedly stole an estimated \$10 billion from their people, with the family said to have spent the funds on artworks, foreign property, jewels and other material goods.

Imelda, 90, has been ridiculed for her [shoe collection](#), which consists of 3,000 pairs of shoes, many of which are now on display at the Marikina Shoe Museum in Metro Manila, Philippines. "Mrs Marcos has had a habit of buying fake paintings, as well as lending fake paintings for display," said Ruben Carranza, a former commissioner for the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG), an organization created to recoup ill-gotten wealth stolen by the Marcos family.

Carranza says it is unclear whether the Picasso painting is genuine or a fake.

"The fact that she's now displaying it just shows not just the duplicity of Mrs. Marcos, but that she has to display the duplicity and the extravagance that she thinks she's displaying for Filipinos to see... That says something even worse."

"It shows this really, absolutely uncaring attitude for [Filipinos](#). They've not only now been led to believe that [the Marcoses] have gold. Now, they're leading them to believe, again, that they have so much wealth that they can just display it whenever they please," said Carranza. The painting was said to have been confiscated by the government in 2014, when the family's assets - including eight paintings - were targeted for recovery. But Andres Bautista, a former PCGG and Commission on Elections (COMELEC) chairman, says he believes the painting that was seized was a fake.

Now that painting is somehow mysteriously back on Imelda's wall, prompting Bautista to urge the government to take action.

The Marcos family has been made to face some repercussions for their stolen wealth, though not all of it has been returned. Thus far, PCGG has reportedly recovered \$5 billion from the family, though some still remains missing. Marcos Jr. who has neither apologized nor acknowledged his family's historical abuse, will have total control over the organization taxed with recouping his family's ill-gotten wealth once he becomes president.

"How can you do your job well when the president is the person that you're supposed to run after," said [Bautista](#). "It's the fox guarding the hen house."

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Mr. Moral & the Big Steppers: Kendrick Lamar Drops First Album in Five Years

By - Mary Manley

The 34 year-old rapper, who hails from Compton, California, has won 161 awards out of 399 nominations including 14 Grammy Awards, six Billboard Music Awards and an ASCAP award for his work as a composer. Lamar is back with his fifth LP, "Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers," which was released overnight on Thursday.

Rapper Kendrick [Lamar](#) is back after a five-year hiatus following his 2017 album, "DAMN." The much-anticipated album is split into two nine-track sides and features artists Sounwave and Dahi (artists Lamar frequently works with) as well as Beach Noise, The Alchemist, Pharrell Williams, and guests Beth Gibbons, Sampha, Ghostface Killah, Baby Keem, Summer Walker, and Kodak Black.

"Writer's block for two years, nothing moved me," Lamar raps on the third track of his new album.

Lamar, who has often been labeled with the term "[Black genius](#)," writes lyrics filled with socio/political commentary— especially on the [Black American experience](#)— such songs include: "Vanity Slaves," "HiiiPower," "m.A.A.d city" and "Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst," just to list a few. Pop music critic [Jon Caramanica](#) described Lamar's 2015 album "To Pimp a Butterfly" as a "work about living under constant racialized surveillance and how that can lead to many types of internal monologues, some empowered, some self-loathing."

"Mr. Moral & the Big Steppers" is personal, heavy and self-criticizing, with songs that refer to Lamar's mental health, his romantic relationship, and becoming a father. Whitney Alford,



Lamar's longtime partner whom he has known since teenage-hood and who he now shares two children with, is also credited as a narrator on the album.

Lamar is beginning to make waves in his work as an entrepreneur, too. First launched in 2020 and founded by both Lamar and Dave Free, his collaborator at Top Dawg Entertainment, Lamar has been growing his company [pgLang](#). Lamar has insisted that the firm, whose name is an acronym for "program language," is not a record label, but rather is a company "at service to creators and projects that selflessly speak with, and for, the shared experiences that connect us all," according to the group's mission statement.

On Friday, Lamar also revealed the launch of his world tour, which will begin July 19 in Oklahoma City. He'll follow the US leg of his tour with shows in Europe, Britain, Australia and New Zealand in the fall.

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CNN Mistakenly Sent Staffers Gift Boxes After Firing Them From CNN+ Team  
By - Mary Manley

The hyped streaming service CNN+, which was supposed to mark a major milestone for the 40 year-old multinational news channel, shut down on April 30 just a month after its initial launch. Following Jeff Zucker's resignation as president of CNN, internal support for the streaming service crumbled, and CEO David Zaslav effectively killed the service.

Ex-staffers got a slap in the face when after being fired from the month-old streaming service they received gift boxes filled with CNN+ [merchandise](#) including gear, pens, food containers, a popcorn maker, and headphones. The boxes also included what would have been a heartwarming sentiment if not for the grim circumstances of having just been laid off.

"This is an incredible time to be part of CNN," the enclosed note read. "Build relationships and take time to connect with colleagues and learn so that you make the most of your time here." The mailed gifts were apparently sent by mistake to the 400+ workers who were fired from CNN+, a company representative relayed to the [Wall Street Journal](#).

After hiring several hundreds of New York-based production staff who poured in hours of work on daily programming, set design, and an investment of \$300 million, Warner Bros. Discovery pulled the plug on the streaming service, laying off hundreds of CNN staffers. Some of the employees said they had left other stable jobs and freelancing work for the exciting experience of what one top producer described as CNN's "Apollo Mission."

CBS journalist Wesley Lowery commented on the fallout, sharing his own career insight.

Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav didn't approve of the program even before taking over as the new manager of CNN+, following [Jeff Zucker's](#) scandalous resignation.

Zaslav looked at the low subscription numbers for the \$5.99-a-month service and after only 150,000 subscribers signed up during its first few weeks, decided to pull the plug on a project he most likely viewed as hemorrhaging money. However, CNN executives had argued the service would garner at least two million subscribers within its first year.

Following the abrupt end of CNN+, the new head of CNN [Chris Licht](#) addressed the dejected employees, saying: "This is a uniquely s\*\*\*\*\* situation. It is not your fault that you had the rug pulled out from underneath you."

According to Licht, all ex-CNN+ employees will continue to be paid, as well as receive benefits for up to 90 days following their departure.

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An Australian Mother Who Lost Her Infant to SIDS May Have Just Found The Cause  
By - Ian DeMartino

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome kills thousands of babies every year and no one knows why. After losing her infant child to it 29 years ago, Dr. Carmel Harrington led the research team that may have discovered the cause.

Australian researchers have found a possible biomarker for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) that may someday help doctors and parents prevent the 3,400 SIDS deaths that occur annually in the United States alone.

[The study](#) took blood samples from 67 infants who died of SIDS and compared them to a control group of babies who died of other causes and healthy living infants. They found that the infants who died of SIDS had a lower amount of an enzyme called butyrylcholinesterase (BChE) in their blood than both living babies and infants who died of other causes.

SIDS usually happens when the baby is sleeping. Typically, parents put their seemingly healthy baby to sleep and are horrified when the baby never wakes up again. Most of the time when a baby is having difficulty breathing or some other life-threatening issue they will wake up and cry until a parent or guardian attends to them. Babies who fall victim to SIDS never do and it has been a mystery as to why.

It has [been speculated](#) that there is something wrong with their cholinergic system, which is part of the autonomic system that regulates involuntary bodily functions like blood pressure and breathing. The cholinergic system specifically deals with brain functions like sensory perception and significantly, sleep and arousal. The BChE enzyme is a part of the cholinergic system.

"Babies have a very powerful mechanism to let us know when they are not happy. Usually, if a baby is confronted with a life-threatening situation, such as difficulty breathing during sleep because they are on their tummies, they will arouse and cry out," lead researcher Dr. Carmel Harrington told the Sydney Children's Hospital Network. "What this research shows is that some babies don't have this same robust arousal response."

Harrington has dedicated her career and life to finding the cause of SIDS after her own baby died of it 29 years ago. While incidents of SIDS have been reduced by half in recent years due to safe sleep practices and a reduction in smoking during pregnancy, there is still more work to be done in the field and this study is the first that may point to a cause.

That work includes replicating the results of this study. The sample size of 67 infants is too small to say anything definitive about the cause of SIDS, but it does give doctors and scientists a prime suspect to investigate further.



If the study's results can be replicated, then the next steps would be to start checking newborns for a deficiency of BChE and then developing safe treatments to address it.

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Cause of the Biggest Extinction Event in World History Has Been Discovered  
By - Ian DeMartino

There have been five confirmed mass extinction events in Earth's history. The Great Permian extinction is believed to be the worst and marks the line between the Permian period and Triassic periods.

Scientists believe they may have found the cause of the greatest extinction event in earth's history: Global warming caused by [massive volcanic eruptions](#) between 256 and 252 million years ago in what is now the east coast of Australia.

Scientists were already aware that the extinction event was caused by the planet's warming, but they were unsure what caused it. The prevailing theory was volcanic eruptions in what is now Siberia, but there is evidence that the earth had already warmed 6 - 8C by the time the Siberian volcanoes began spewing out magma over two million years.

Evidence has been uncovered in the New England region of New South Wales, Australia, that a massive supervolcano, similar to those found in Yellowstone Park in the United States and Taupo, New Zealand, shot 150,000 km<sup>3</sup> into the atmosphere, filling it with greenhouse gasses and covering the entire east coast of Australia with ash that would have measured meters thick in some places.

To put that in perspective, the 79AD Mt. Vesuvius eruption that destroyed the Roman city of Pompeii and preserved it in ash only emitted 3 - 4 km<sup>3</sup> of volcanic material. For a more modern example, the Mt. St. Helens 1980 eruption killed 57 people and is the deadliest eruption in the United States history, only emitted 1 km<sup>3</sup> of volcanic material.

The scientists, who published their findings in Nature, believe that the Siberian volcanoes that followed exacerbated the disaster that the volcanoes in Australia already started.

It is worth noting that at this time, the Earth was a far different place. Nearly every landmass was connected, including what is now Australia and Siberia, in a supercontinent known as Pangaea.

While the extinction event that killed off the dinosaurs at the end of the Jurassic period 65 million years ago is the most famous, this extinction event, known as the Great Permian Extinction was far worse and nearly ended life on the planet entirely.

After both the Australian and Siberian volcanic events, the earth's temperatures continued to rise, up to 10C on land and 8C on the ocean's surface. This led to the death of nearly all of the earth's trees and killed 95% of marine life and 70% of land species. Just about the only non-microbiological kingdom that did well was fungi, which thrived off of the dead organic material left behind from the plants and animals dying in massive numbers.

Some scientists believe we are living through a sixth mass extinction event right now, called the [Holocene extinction](#). It began 10,000 years ago but it is believed human activity is accelerating it greatly through pollution and habitat destruction.

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Senate Democrats Want One More Chance to 'Push Biden Left' on Student Debt

By - Ian DeMartino

Student debt has been a growing problem in the United States for years. Over the last decade, total student loan debt surpassed both credit card and auto debt held by Americans. As of last year, 43.4 million Americans collectively held \$1.61 trillion in student debt.

Senate Democrats want US President Joe Biden to hold off on announcing his decision on how he intends to handle growing student loan debt, at least until they talk to him first.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) along with Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Raphael Warnock (D-GA) have told the White House they would prefer if Biden held off on signing any executive orders until they get one more chance to push Biden closer to their position, according to a [report from Politico](#), citing two people "familiar with the matter."

Biden has indicated in recent weeks that he is close to making a decision on student loan debt.

Schumer earlier claimed that he felt that Biden was moving towards his position on the issue.

The Senate majority leader and other left-leaning Democrats have said they want \$50,000 in student debt to be wiped out. During the 2020 campaign, Biden proposed eliminating just \$10,000.

Shortly after Schumer stated he felt Biden was moving towards him, Biden unequivocally stated he is not considering \$50,000 in student debt relief, but will consider forgiving some debt.

Biden has received some criticism from more progressive Democrats in Congress. US Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) has indicated that Biden is losing young voters due to a lack of action, with Warren stating that Democrats cannot rest on their laurels if they plan to keep control of Congress after November's midterm elections.

Early in the pandemic, former US President Donald Trump paused student loan repayments, a policy that Biden has thus far continued; however, payments are set to resume in August, though another pause or some relief is likely before then.

A move to wipe out significant amounts of student debt would undoubtedly be popular among young voters, a block the Democrats depend on to win elections. According to a recent Harvard poll, 85% of voters aged 18 - 29 want the government to [cancel at least some](#) student debt, though only 38% are in favor of total forgiveness.

According to Politico, there are no meetings scheduled between Biden and the progressive wing of the party, but a White House source told them that Biden would be "amenable to one."

Multiple reports have indicated Biden administration officials are looking for a way to means-test student debt relief, but the Department of Education has told them privately that they do not have data on the income rates of borrowers to do that automatically, complicating and potentially delaying the relief significantly.



Biden's decision on student debt relief is expected in the coming weeks.

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#### **Buffalo Shooter Had Plans to Continue Rampage - Police Chief**

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The gunman who killed 10 people in a racially motivated mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, had plans to continue his rampage according to documents recovered by law enforcement officers, police revealed on Monday.

On Saturday, a shooting in a supermarket in the city of Buffalo resulted in 10 people dead and three injured. The FBI qualified the incident as a racially motivated hate crime, and President Joe Biden called for every effort to end "hate-fueled domestic terrorism." The 18-year-old perpetrator had posted a white supremacist manifesto prior to the crime that featured the Black Sun symbol, used in Nazi Germany and later by neo-Nazis, including by Ukrainian battalion Azov.

"There was evidence that was uncovered that he had plans, had he gotten out of here, to continue his rampage and continue shooting people. He'd even spoken about possibly going to another store," Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia told CNN.

There is "some documentation" showing the suspect had plans possibly for a shooting at "another large superstore," he continued.

"He was going to get in his car and continue to drive down Jefferson Avenue and continue doing the same thing," the police chief said.

To address the problem of mass shootings and gun violence, President Biden in April unveiled a number of steps, including a ban on ghost gun kits.

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#### **Biden Authorizes US Military to Redeploy Troops to Somalia - Reports**

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has signed an order which authorizes the US military to once again send hundreds of special operations forces inside Somalia, The New York Times reported on Monday, citing four officials familiar with the matter.

Biden also approved a request from the Defense Department for standing authority to target suspected leaders of Al Shabab terrorists, officials said.

The US president signed off on the proposal submitted by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in early May, according to the officials.

Adrienne Watson, the National Security Council spokeswoman, confirmed the move, adding that it would enable a "more effective fight against Al Shabab," the report said.

"The decision to reintroduce a persistent presence was made to maximize the safety and effectiveness of our forces and enable them to provide more efficient support to our partners," she said.

Somalia collapsed as a unified nation in 1991 with the downfall of Siad Barre's dictatorship. The international community recognized the federal government as the only legitimate authority in the country, which controls the capital Mogadishu and several other areas. The rest of Somalia is controlled by unrecognized entities or self-governed, including the unrecognized Republic of Somaliland in the north and the autonomous Puntland region in the east.

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#### **US Republican Leader McConnell Says Will Support Finnish, Swedish Accession to NATO**

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell on Monday issued a statement in support of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, following a trip to the two countries by him and other lawmakers.

"It was a special honor to visit both these strong, proud nations during the exact days when both countries' governments were concluding their deliberations and preparing to formally move forward with joining NATO," McConnell said. "I gave both the Swedish and Finnish leaders my personal assurance that I would fully support their NATO accession."

McConnell recently returned from a visit to Finland and Sweden alongside fellow Republican Senators Susan Collins, John Cornyn, and John Barrasso.

McConnell as Senate Republican Leader will do everything in his power to ensure that the United States' role in the NATO accession process moves forward quickly and smoothly, the lawmaker said in the statement.

Finland and Sweden would bring value as new NATO members and strengthen the alliance significantly, McConnell said, pointing to both nations' commitments to defense funding. The two countries have geographical importance, well-equipped armed forces, strong military industrial bases, and interoperability with US and NATO forces, McConnell added.

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#### **Blinken Welcomes Resumption of Commercial Flights Between Sanaa, Amman**

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday welcomed the resumption of flights between Yemen's Sanaa and Jordan's Amman.

Earlier in the day, a plane of Yemen's flag carrier Yemenia took off from Sanaa International Airport en route to the Jordanian capital in the first commercial passenger flight after years of war.



"The United States welcomes today's flight between Sana'a, Yemen, and Amman, Jordan, the first commercial flight from Sana'a since 2016. We hope it will enable Yemenis to travel to see loved ones, seek medical care, and find respite from the conflict," Blinken said in a statement. He added that the United States appreciates the efforts of the Yemeni authorities and the UN special envoy's efforts to enable this flight and thanks Saudi Arabia and Jordan for their support. "We look forward to regular flights to and from Sana'a as called for in the UN-led truce. We urge all parties to adhere to the terms of the truce and make progress on other steps to bring relief to Yemenis - including urgently opening roads to Taiz, the third largest city with hundreds of thousands of Yemenis in need of humanitarian assistance, and other contested areas, where Yemenis have suffered for far too long," Blinken said.

US National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson also welcomed the resumption of flights.

"Yemen today is witnessing its calmest period since the war began, and these flights are an important step in further improving the lives and opportunities for the Yemeni people. The United States thanks Saudi Arabia for its leadership in helping to overcome obstacles to the resumption of these flights," she said.

On April 2, a two-month UN-brokered ceasefire began in Yemen, supported by all parties to the conflict, including the Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthis. As part of the truce, commercial flights from Sanaa International Airport to Egypt were expected to resume in April, but did not.

The conflict between the Yemeni government forces and the Houthis has been going on since 2014. The situation was further aggravated in 2015 after a coalition led by Saudi Arabia joined the conflict on the Yemeni government's side and began conducting air, land, and sea operations against the Islamist rebel movement.

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US, EU to Deepen Information Sharing on Exports of Critical Technology - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The United States-European Union Trade and Technology Council (US-EU TTC) will deepen information sharing on exports of critical technology among other things during this week's ministerial in Paris, a senior US administration official told reporters.

"You're going to see us deepen this [TTC] partnership and announce a number of key outcomes, including deeper information sharing on exports of critical US, EU technology, commitment to develop a joint roadmap on evaluation and measurement tools for trustworthy artificial intelligence and risk management," the official said.

The US-EU TTC second ministerial meeting is taking place on May 15-16 in Segway technology hub near Paris, France. In June, US President Joe Biden, European Commission President von der Leyen, and European Council President Charles Michel established the US-EU TTC to promote the transatlantic trade and investment.

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US, EU to Jointly Develop Response to Food Challenges Amid Conflict in Ukraine - Official

WASHINGTON, May 16 (Sputnik) - The United States and the European Union will establish a policy dialogue within the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) to develop responses to potential global food challenges amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, a senior US administration official told reporters.

The US-EU TTC, established last summer by the United States, European Commission, and European Council to promote transatlantic trade and investment, is holding its second ministerial meeting in Segway technology hub near Paris, France from May 15-16.

"We [US-EU TTC] are establishing a policy dialogue aimed at developing responses to global food security challenges caused by Russian aggression in Ukraine," the official said.

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RPT - PREVIEW - NATO Response to Ukraine Crisis, US-EU Trade in Focus as Blinken Visits Europe

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Berlin and Paris from May 14-16 for meetings with NATO allies and trade talks with the EU, during which the issue of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine is likely to be featured prominently.

Blinken will first travel to Berlin, where on May 14 he will meet informally with NATO foreign ministers to discuss a unified response to the situation in Ukraine. The leaders will also discuss revisions to NATO's strategic concept.

Finland and Sweden, who have recently expressed interest in joining the alliance, will also attend the informal meetings.

US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith will represent the United States during the opening session on Saturday, and Blinken will lead the US delegation during meetings on Sunday, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said on Friday.

Blinken will then travel to Paris on May 15 for a meeting of the US-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), where he will be joined by US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

The delegation will meet with EU leaders on how democratic approaches to trade and technology can serve as a force for greater prosperity while also protecting advancing shared values. Blinken will also meet with representatives of business, labor and civil society to hear their views on the TTC's work.



US engagement with NATO and EU allies has increased significantly in recent months amid Russia's special operation in Ukraine. NATO is scheduled to hold a high-level summit in Madrid in June, with a US-EU summit likely to be held shortly afterward.

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#### US, Foreign Bank Officials Discuss Boosting Russia Sanctions Implementation - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo met with representatives from several foreign financial institutions to discuss sanctions imposed on Russia and efforts to strengthen implementation of the measures, the Treasury Department said in a press release.

"Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo met with representatives from several foreign financial institutions at the Institute of International Bankers' (IIB) New York offices today... The Deputy Secretary heard about IIB Members' efforts to improve sanctions implementation and ways in which they are adapting their business and compliance operations in response to the effects of Russia's war against Ukraine," the Treasury said in the release on Friday.

Adeyemo underscored during the meeting the Treasury's focus on stopping sanctions evasion and conveyed to the foreign bank representatives the risks of facilitating sanctions evasion, including the risk of sanctions exposure for providing material support to a sanctioned entity, the release said.

The Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) expects all financial institutions to do their part to ensure they are not allowing transactions with a sanctioned person, the release said.

Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics applied for help in fending off Kiev's provocations. The United States and the EU have since been pressuring Russia with sanctions and have rolled out a number of sanctions packages, which include airspace closures and restrictive measures targeting numerous Russian officials and entities, media, and financial institutions.

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#### US Astrophysicist Says Doorway on Mars Pictured By NASA 'Natural Geology'

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - NASA's Curiosity rover examined a rectangular hole on the surface of Mars and the pictures it took excited fans of the theories of extraterrestrial civilizations, however, there is nothing supernatural in them, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics expert Jonathan McDowell told Sputnik.

"Natural geology: rock fractures often happen in straight lines," McDowell said on Friday. "I understand it's about 30 cm, and it's the intersection between two linear rock fractures."

NASA published on its website photos made by Curiosity at the site of the rectangular hole. The attention of space lovers was attracted by the image, which was obtained using the Mastcam camera installed on the rover in the Greenheugh Pediment area on May 7th. The image shows a rectangular recess that resembles the entrance to the catacombs, which some Internet users have already dubbed an "alien door."

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#### US Gasoline Prices Hit 4th Consecutive Record High on Friday - Automobile Association

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US gasoline prices reached a record high for a fourth consecutive day this week, according to the American Automobile Association (AAA). Data from the AAA showed on Friday that the national average price for a gallon of regular gasoline in the United States costs \$4.43, marking the fourth consecutive day that the national average price reached a new all-time high this week. Diesel prices have also been surging in the United States this week and hit an all-time high national record on Friday as well at \$5.56 per gallon, the data shows. The International Energy Agency cautioned on Thursday that soaring prices at the pump and slowing economic growth are expected to significantly curb the demand recovery for oil through the remainder of 2022 and next year. Economists are also warning that the recovering US economy could head for recession from runaway inflation and aggressive interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve.

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#### Biden Nominates Former Albright Aide to Be US Ambassador to Hungary - White House

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden nominated career diplomat David Pressman to be the next US ambassador to Hungary, the White House said in a press release. "Today, President Biden announced his intent to nominate the following individuals to serve as key leaders in his administration: David Pressman, Nominee for Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Hungary," the release said on Friday. Pressman spent his early career in Washington as an aide to the late Madeleine Albright, who was Secretary of State under the Clinton administration, the release said. However, one of his most important posts was as the US Ambassador to the United Nations for Special Political Affairs, the release added. At the United Nations, Pressman represented the United States on the UN Security Council and led US negotiations on a range of international peace and security matters, with a particular focus on issues involving Europe, Russia, East Asia and the Pacific and Africa, according to the release.



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**US Conveys Protest to Israel Over Violence at Al-Jazeera Reporters' Funeral - Reports**  
(Updates with more details in paras 3, 4)

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US officials conveyed a protest to the Israeli government over the Israeli police beating Palestinians attending the funeral procession of Al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed this week during an Israeli raid in the West Bank, Axios reported.

The report on Friday said, citing US and Israeli sources, that the Biden administration is angry and frustrated about the incident.

US and Israeli officials told Axios that US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides made clear to Israeli officials it was important to the Biden administration that Abu Akleh's funeral be honorable, peaceful and accessible for anyone who wanted to attend.

President Joe Biden said during a press conference on Friday he did not know all the details surrounding Abu Akleh's death but knows that it must be investigated.

According to a video that circulated on social media, some participants of the funeral procession tried to attach a Palestinian flag to the coffin with the body of the reporter that Israeli police tried to prevent. The footage shows Israeli police use rubber batons to beat Palestinians participating in the funeral procession, which at one point almost caused them to drop the coffin.

United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said that the United Nations is aware of the video showing violence during the funeral and calls on the Israeli government to protect the freedom of peaceful assembly.

The 51-year-old Palestinian-American journalist was shot in the head on Wednesday while covering an Israeli raid in the West Bank. Reporters on the scene said they were targeted by Israeli snipers when the group was alone in the streets of Jenin and were clearly identifiable as being members of the press.

Israel offered Palestine a joint investigation into Abu Akleh's death. On Friday morning, the Israeli Defense Forces said that preliminary investigation could not unequivocally determine the source of the shooting that killed Abu Akleh.

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**Wall Street Rallies Hard But Not Enough to Prevent 6th Straight Weekly Loss**

NEW YORK, May 14 (Sputnik) - US stocks rallied across the board as investors rediscovered their appetite for risk, but the rebound was not enough to prevent Wall Street from posting a sixth straight week of losses.

The three major stock indices on Wall Street - the broad-based Dow Jones Industrial Average, the top-500 stocks indicator S&P 500, and the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite - closed Friday's session up by an average of 2.6%.

For the week though, the components were down about 2% each or more, extending the bearish streak they had displayed since late March after the Federal Reserve began to raise interest rates aggressively to counter the worst US inflation in four decades.

"US stocks are finishing on a high note as investors take comfort from a round of Fed speak that suggests financial markets won't have to price in even more tightening of financial conditions over the next couple of FOMC decisions," said Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA.

The FOMC, which stands for the policy-making Federal Open Market Committee of the Federal Reserve, slashed interest rates to nearly zero during the initial COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020. It then left them there to shield the economy during the two-year run of the pandemic. The result, however, was an explosion in inflation as the economy recovered.

This year, the Fed raised rates during back-to-back FOMC meetings in March and May, opting for a 25 basis point hike the first time and a 50 basis point increase the next. Its aggressive actions had led to speculation that the central bank will resort to a 75-basis point hike next at the June FOMC meeting, a move economists said would be excessive and could tip the economy into recession. Fed officials had dismissed that speculation in recent days, saying they would likely stick to 50-basis point hikes at the June and July meetings of the FOMC and also try to achieve a "soft landing" for the economy from the higher rate regime.

The Nasdaq led the rally in US stocks on Friday, rising 3.8% to close at 11,805. For the week though, it was down 2.8% and for the year, it showed a decline of 24.5%.

The Dow rose 1.5% to close the day at 32,197. It fell 2.1% on the week and was down 11.4% for the year.

The S&P 500 gained 2.4% to finish Friday at 4,024. For the week, it shed 2.4% while for the year, it was down 15.6%.

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**Blinken 'Deeply Troubled' by Israeli Police Actions at Al Jazeera Journalist's Funeral**  
WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said in a statement that the United States is "deeply troubled" to see the Israeli police's actions during the funeral of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh in Jerusalem.

"We were deeply troubled to see the images of Israeli police intruding into her funeral procession today. Every family deserves to be able to lay their loved ones to rest in a dignified and unimpeded manner. We remain in close contact with our Israeli and Palestinian counterparts and call on all to maintain calm and avoid any actions that could further escalate tensions," the statement said on Friday.

The 51-year-old Palestinian-American reporter was shot in the head on Wednesday while covering an Israeli raid in the West Bank. Reporters on the scene said they were targeted by Israeli snipers when the group was alone in the streets of Jenin despite being clearly identifiable as being members of the press.



Israel offered Palestine a joint investigation into Abu Akleh's death. On Friday morning, the Israeli Defense Forces said that preliminary investigation could not unequivocally determine the source of the shooting that killed Abu Akleh.

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#### **Senator Paul Says Sympathetic to Ukraine, But Does Not Want to Bankrupt US With Funding**

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) - US Senator Rand Paul said after delaying the passage of a \$40 billion aid package for Ukraine that although he is sympathetic to the country's situation, he does not want to bankrupt the United States by overspending on foreign causes.

"I have great sympathy for [Ukraine]. I want them to succeed. But I don't want them to succeed in the process of bankrupting our country," Paul said on Friday in an interview on WMAL.

Passing the legislation would bring the total amount sent by the US to Ukraine over the last two months to nearly \$54 billion. That level of spending on a foreign issue while taxpayers struggle to buy gas, groceries and baby formula is a "slap in the face," Paul said on Thursday via Twitter. Paul also said that his oath of office is to the US Constitution and not any foreign nation.

Paul on Thursday delayed a Senate attempt to fast track the \$40 billion Ukraine aid bill, citing concerns over government spending, debt and inflation. Paul demanded an amendment to the legislation that would provide for further federal oversight of the money and weapons being sent to Ukraine, which Senate Democratic leadership denied.

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#### **SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY**

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Sputnik) -

#### **UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS**

\* Pentagon warns of possible interruptions in the deliveries of military aid to Ukraine after May 19 if the Congress fails to approve a supplemental funding bill soon, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said on Friday.

\* Two cameramen of a RT filming crew have been wounded by shrapnel after being caught under fire by the Ukrainian military near the city of Dokuchaievsk in the Donetsk People's Republic, RT said.

\* Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is ready for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in a meeting mediated by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said.

#### **PUTIN-SCHOLZ TALKS**

- \* Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz have discussed the situation in Ukraine, focusing on humanitarian aspects, during a phone conversation, the Kremlin said on Friday.

- \* Scholz said that during a telephone conversation with Putin he called for an early ceasefire in Ukraine.

#### SWEDEN, FINLAND ASSESSMENT TO NATO

- \* US President Joe Biden spoke with Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson and Finnish President Sauli Niinisto on Friday, the White House said, as cited in a pool report

- \* The Biden administration is working to clarify Turkish President' Recep Erdogan's comments in opposition to Sweden or Finland joining NATO, US Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said.

- \* Turkey is following the developments around plans for the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, and cannot assess the situation positively yet, Erdogan said.

- \* Biden spoke by telephone with the leaders of Sweden and Finland and emphasized the United States' support for NATO's Open Door policy and for the right of each country to decide whether to join the military alliance, the White House said.

#### UN SECURITY COUNCIL

- \* Russia plans to activate Articles 5 and 6 of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) to investigate the bio-laboratories in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said during the UN Security Council meeting on Friday.

- \* UN deputy arms chief Thomas Markram suggested on Friday activating the Biological Weapons Convention mechanisms to address Russia's concerns over bio labs in Ukraine.

- \* Russia will present the UN Security Council with new evidence on US military biological activity in Ukraine, Nebenzia said.

#### UAE PRESIDENT DEATH

- \* UAE President Khalifa bin Zeid Al Nahyan, who has been in office since 2004, died at the age of 73 after a long illness, Emirates News Agency reported on Friday, citing the Presidential Affairs Ministry.

- \* Russian President Vladimir Putin conveyed words of sympathy to the family of late Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed and the entire people of the UAE, noting that he had done a lot to strengthen friendly relations, the Kremlin said.

- \* US President Joe Biden has expressed his condolences over the death of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan.

#### US-RUSSIA MILITARY TALKS

- \* Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu discussed by phone with Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin topical issues of international security, including the situation in Ukraine, the conversation took place at the initiative of the US side, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.

- \* Austin spoke on Friday with Shoigu for the first time since February 18 and called for a ceasefire in Ukraine, spokesman John Kirby said.



\* Austin and Shoigu spoke on the telephone earlier on Friday for an hour but did not resolve any issues in Ukraine, Reuters reported citing a US official.

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**PREVIEW - NATO Response to Ukraine Crisis, US-EU Trade in Focus as Blinken Visits Europe**

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Blinken will first travel to Berlin, where on May 14 he will meet informally with NATO foreign ministers to discuss a unified response to the situation in Ukraine. The leaders will also discuss revisions to NATO's strategic concept.

Finland and Sweden, who have recently expressed interest in joining the alliance, will also attend the informal meetings.

US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith will represent the United States during the opening session on Saturday, and Blinken will lead the US delegation during meetings on Sunday, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said on Friday. Blinken will then travel to Paris on May 15 for a meeting of the US-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), where he will be joined by US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

The delegation will meet with EU leaders on how democratic approaches to trade and technology can serve as a force for greater prosperity while also protecting advancing shared values. Blinken will also meet with representatives of business, labor and civil society to hear their views on the TTC's work.

US engagement with NATO and EU allies has increased significantly in recent months amid Russia's special operation in Ukraine. NATO is scheduled to hold a high-level summit in Madrid in June, with a US-EU summit likely to be held shortly afterward.

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**Oil Prices Increase 4% on Day, Cost of Fuel in US Remains at Record Highs**

NEW YORK, May 13 (Sputnik) - Crude prices jumped 4% on Friday but showed little weekly changes after accounting for sharp losses at the start of the week.

The London-traded Brent, the global benchmark for crude, settled at \$111.55 a barrel, up \$4.10, or 3.8%, on the day. For the week, it was down 0.7%.

Brent rallied on reports that China might start easing up soon on coronavirus lockdowns in Shanghai, which has seen limited economic activity over the past seven weeks from strict movement curbs placed by the authorities.

Gains in Brent were, however, capped by the European Union's continued delay in reaching consensus for a ban on Russian oil, particularly after resistance from Hungary, which fears finding itself in an energy crisis without supplies from Moscow.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the benchmark for US crude, settled at \$110.49, up \$4.36, or 4.1%. For the week, it rose 0.7%.

WTI rallied on an apparent crunch in US oil refining capacity, which has sent pump prices of fuel to record highs this week, with diesel reaching all-time highs above \$6 a gallon and gasoline record highs above \$4.50.

The divergence between Brent and WTI is "a story of two oils," energy hedge fund Again Capital partner John Kilduff said.

"The holdout on an European embargo of Russian oil, particularly by Hungary, is limiting Brent's upside, while WTI is basking in bullish glory from the refining crunch in fuels that's sent US pump prices to record highs," Kilduff said.

The International Energy Agency, however, cautioned on Thursday that soaring prices at the pump and slowing economic growth are expected to significantly curb the demand recovery for oil through the remainder of 2022 and next year.

Economists also warn that the recovering US economy could head for recession from runaway inflation and aggressive interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve.

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**Biden Announces Will Appoint His Adviser Yohannes Abraham as Ambassador to ASEAN**

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced on Friday that he will appoint one of his closest advisers, Yohannes Abraham, to be ambassador to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"We are not only celebrating 45 years of partnership and friendship between ASEAN and the United States. We are launching a new era in US-ASEAN relations," Biden said. "I am also proud to announce that I have nominated one of my closest advisers to be US Ambassador to ASEAN, Yohannes Abraham."

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**US Conveys Protest to Israel Over Violence at Al-Jazeera Reporter's Funeral - Reports**

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US officials conveyed a protest to the Israeli government over the Israeli police beating Palestinians attending the funeral procession of Al-Jazeera



reporter Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed this week during an Israeli raid in the West Bank, Axios reported on Friday.

The report said, citing US and Israeli sources, that the Biden administration is angry and frustrated about the event.

According to a video that circulated on social media, some participants of the funeral procession tried to attach a Palestinian flag to the coffin with the body of the reporter that Israeli police tried to prevent. The footage shows Israeli police use rubber batons to beat Palestinians participating in the funeral procession, which at one point almost caused them to drop the coffin.

United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said that the United Nations is aware of the video showing violence during the funeral and calls on the Israeli government to protect the freedom of peaceful assembly.

The 51-year-old Palestinian-American journalist was shot in the head on Wednesday while covering an Israeli raid in the West Bank. Reporters on the scene said they were targeted by Israeli snipers when the group was alone in the streets of Jenin and were clearly identifiable as being members of the press.

Israel offered Palestine a joint investigation into Abu Akleh's death. On Friday morning, the Israeli Defense Forces said that preliminary investigation could not unequivocally determine the source of the shooting that killed Abu Akleh.

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Biden Says There Will Be More to Announce on Swedish, Finnish Security Interests 'Shortly'

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that there will be more to announce with respect to security interests from Sweden and Finland shortly.

"I'm not going to go into the detail about my private conversations with the presidents of Sweden and Finland, except that we had a good conversation and they expressed their interest and desires relating to security, and there will be more to report on that shortly," Biden said during a press conference.

Earlier in the day, the White House said in a readout of the talks that Biden emphasized the United States' support for NATO's open door policy and for the right of each country to decide whether to join the military alliance. The three leaders also reiterated their shared commitment to continue coordinating military and other support for Ukraine, the readout added.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey cannot view favorably the accession of Finland or Sweden into NATO. Erdogan also referenced Turkey's discontent with Greece's participation in NATO military activities starting in 1980, calling the move a mistake that should not be allowed to be repeated.

In March, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance will fast-track the membership applications of Finland and Sweden if they decide to join. On Thursday, both Finland and Sweden officially confirmed their plans to join NATO. The United States and Germany have already pledged support to the Nordic states if they choose to apply for membership in the alliance.

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**US Needs 'Many Months of Falling Inflation' to Be Sure Prices Have Peaked - Fed's Mester**

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve will need to see many months of contracting US prices to be sure that the four-decade highs in inflation have peaked, the central bank's chief for the state of Cleveland said.

"It will take many months of falling inflation [for the Fed] to be confident that it has peaked," Loretta Mester told a live-streamed event on Friday.

At the earliest, the Fed would have to wait until its September policy meeting to determine whether prices were continuing to increase or have begun to decrease, and how to craft policy thereon, Mester said.

After contracting 3.5% in 2020 from disruptions forced by the coronavirus pandemic, the US economy expanded by 5.7% in 2021, growing at its fastest pace since 1982.

But inflation has grown just as fast as the economy, or maybe a tad quicker. The Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, an inflation indicator closely followed by the Fed, rose by 5.8% in the year to December and 6.6% in the 12 months to March. Both readings reflected the fastest growth since the 1980s. The Consumer Price Index and the Producer Price Index, two other key gauges for inflation, rose 8.3% and 11%, respectively, in the year to April.

The Fed's own tolerance for inflation is just 2% per year. The central bank has indicated that a total of seven rate hikes — the maximum allowable under its calendar of meetings this year — were on slot for 2022. More rate adjustments could follow in 2023, until a return to the 2% inflation target is achieved, the Fed has said.

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**Military Aid to Ukraine Can Be Halted If Congress Fails to Approve Funding - Pentagon**

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – Pentagon warns of possible interruptions in the deliveries of military aid to Ukraine after May 19 if the Congress fails to approve a supplemental funding bill soon, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said on Friday.

"[M]ay 19 is the day that without additional authorities, we begin to not have the ability to send new stuff [into Ukraine]," Kirby said during a press briefing. "If we don't get those authorities soon, it is possible that there could be a bubble, a period of time in which there's just nothing moving and we want to make sure we avoid that."

Kirby added that there is still no decision on the remaining \$100 million of presidential drawdown authorities and he does not expect a decision any time soon.



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**Iran Nuclear Deal Remains 'Far From Certain' - US State Department**

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - Efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal remain far from certain and Tehran needs to decide whether it wants to conclude a deal quickly, a State Department spokesperson said on Friday.

"[A]t this point a deal remains far from certain. Iran needs to decide whether it insists on extraneous conditions and whether it wants to conclude a deal quickly, which we believe would serve all sides' interests," the spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik. "We and our partners are ready, and have been for some time. It's now up to Iran."

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**Nothing Changes About Turkey in NATO After Erdogan's Remarks on Finland, Sweden - Pentagon**

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – Nothing has changed about Turkey's standing in NATO following President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's comments on Finland's and Sweden's plans to join the alliance, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Friday.

"They [Turkey] are a NATO ally. They have been involved and helpful and trying to get dialogue going here between Russia and Ukraine," Kirby said during a press briefing. "So, nothing changes about their standing in the NATO alliance. And we're working to better clarify their position here [on Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO]."

Earlier on Friday, Erdogan said Ankara cannot view favorably the accession of Finland or Sweden to NATO, citing their "hospitality" toward Kurdish asylum seekers.

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**White House Has No Comment on Extension of Brittney Griner's Arrest in Russia**

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – The White House does not have any comment on the extension of US basketball player Brittney Griner's arrest in Russia, spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Friday.

Earlier in the day, a Russian court ruled to extend Griner's arrest until June 18.

"We don't have a comment on this specific development," Psaki told a briefing. "I would just reiterate that the Russian system wrongfully detained Ms. Griner. We take our responsibility to

assist US citizens seriously, and we will continue to press for fair and transparent treatment to all of US citizens when they are subject to legal processes overseas."

Psaki said last week that the Biden administration determined in coordination with US Special Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens that Griner is being wrongfully detained in Russia. Griner, a two-time Olympic gold medalist, was detained at a Moscow airport on February 18 after a police dog alerted officers to vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage. Griner was playing for the Russian basketball club UMMC Yekaterinburg during the off-season of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) in the United States. The WNBA said in a statement to Sputnik that it is optimistic about Griner's chances to return home.

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#### Austin Deploys 10,500 US Troops to Replace Previously Deployed Units in European Theater

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense ordered the deployment of 10,500 American troops to replace previously deployed troops in the European theater amid Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Friday. "Secretary Austin has ordered the deployment of approximately 10,500 personnel in the coming months to replace previously deployed US Army units, serving in the European Theater of operation," Kirby said during a press briefing. Kirby added that these deployments are not permanent and these forces are not going to fight in Ukraine.

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#### Biden Relays to Swedish, Finnish Leaders US Support for NATO Open Door Policy- White House

(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke by telephone with the leaders of Sweden and Finland and emphasized the United States' support for NATO's Open Door policy and for the right of each country to decide whether to join the military alliance, the White House said in a press release on Friday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson of Sweden and President Sauli Niinisto of Finland to discuss the close defense and security cooperation between our countries as well as our respective efforts aimed at strengthening Transatlantic security," the release said. "President Biden underscored his support for NATO's Open Door policy and for the right of Finland and Sweden to decide their own future, foreign policy and security arrangements."

The leaders also discussed the close partnership among the three countries across a range of global issues, the release said.

Biden and his Swedish and Finnish counterparts reiterated their shared commitment to continue coordinating military and other support for Ukraine, the release said.

Earlier on Friday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey cannot view favorably the accession of Finland or Sweden to NATO. Erdogan also referenced Turkey's discontent with Greece's participation in NATO military activities starting in 1980, calling the move a mistake that should not be allowed to be repeated.

In March, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance will fast-track the membership applications of Finland and Sweden if they decide to join. On Thursday, both Finland and Sweden officially confirmed their plans to join NATO. The United States and Germany have already pledged support to the Nordic states if they choose to apply for membership in the alliance.

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Biden, Jordan King Abdullah II Consult on Recent Events in Mideast - White House

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden met with Jordan's King Abdullah II to consult on a number of events in the Middle East, including the ongoing tensions in Israel and the West Bank, the White House said on Friday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. met today with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and reaffirmed the close and enduring nature of the friendship between the United States and Jordan," the White House said in a press release. "The leaders consulted on recent events in the region and discussed urgent mechanisms to stem violence, calm rhetoric and reduce tensions in Israel and the West Bank."

Biden affirmed his strong support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and underscored the need to preserve the historic status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, the release said.

The two leaders also discussed the political and economic benefits of further regional integration in infrastructure, energy, water and climate projects, with Jordan serving as a critical hub for such cooperation and investment, the release added.

Biden and King Abdullah II agreed to remain in regular touch and to further strengthen ties between the two countries, according to the release.

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Biden Relays to Swedish, Finnish Leaders US Support for NATO Open Door Policy- White House



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#### UN Urges Israel to Protect Freedom of Assembly After Video Emerges of Journalist Funeral

UNITED NATIONS, May 13 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is aware of "shocking" video showing violence during the funeral of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jerusalem and calls on the Israeli government to protect freedom of peaceful assembly, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Friday.

"We have just seen the video coming from this, and this is very shocking to us," Haq said in a press briefing.

Israeli forces fatally shot reporter Shireen Abu Akleh and injured another employee as the two were covering the government forces' raids in the West Bank city of Jenin, media reported on Wednesday.

The video showed violence erupting during Akleh's funeral in Jerusalem when the Israeli police charged the crowd carrying her coffin.

Haq said the United Nations will try to gather more information about the incident.

"Clearly, as in all cases, we want to make sure that the basic rights to freedom of assembly, and of course the right to freedom of peaceful demonstration are protected and upheld," he said.

No country can attack or kill journalists and those who are responsible for such actions need to be brought to account, Haq added.

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#### US, Russian Defense Chiefs Talked for One Hour But Did Not Resolve Any Issues - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu spoke on the telephone earlier on Friday for an hour but did not resolve any issues in Ukraine, Reuters reported citing a US official.

The report said the call was requested by the Pentagon.

Earlier on Friday, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said Austin talked to Shoigu for the first time since February 18 and called for a ceasefire in Ukraine.

The US defense chief also emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication, Kirby added.

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California Man Pleads Guilty to Assaulting Officers During Jan. 6 Riot - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON May 13 (Sputnik) - California resident James McGrew has pleaded guilty to assaulting, resisting and impeding officers during the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, the Justice Department said on Friday.

"McGrew engaged in a series of confrontations with law enforcement officers on Jan. 6. He was part of a crowd that overwhelmed law enforcement officers attempting to prevent rioters from advancing further on the restricted grounds," the Justice Department said in a press release. "He proceeded to an area outside the Upper West Terrace doors to the Capitol Building. He filmed the scene, shouting 'let's go' approximately 14 times, and 'we took this thing.'"

Law enforcement was able to push McGrew out of the congressional rotunda area after more than an hour, the release said.

However, about 45 minutes later, McGrew joined in an attack against officers attempting to secure the Lower West Terrace tunnel entrance to the building, the release added.

McGrew was arrested on May 28, 2021, in Glendale, Arizona. He is scheduled to be sentenced on August 9 and faces up to eight years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000, according to the release.

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Russian Diamond Ban in West Destabilizing Market, Worrying Major Traders - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The West's sanctions against Russia's Alrosa diamond mining company has disrupted the market and caused major challenges for traders, Bloomberg reported on Friday citing experts.

In early April, the Biden administration imposed sanctions on Alrosa, a Russian state-owned enterprise, that is responsible for 90% of Russia's diamond mining capacity and is the source of about a third of all diamonds worldwide.

Vipul Shah, the vice chairman of India's Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council, told Bloomberg that losing access to supply from Russia over a long period will devastate the global diamonds industry, lead to thousands of lost jobs in India, and impact major trading centers around the world.

Although there is a loophole that allows rough diamonds from Russia to make their way to the US market as polished diamonds, Bloomberg reported that several Indian polishers are saying that some of their clients have started refusing Russian-mined stones because they consider them conflict diamonds.

Indian traders are forced to make plans to mark the origin of every stone and reroute the supply of Russian diamonds to friendlier markets in China, Southeast Asia, or the United Arab Emirates, the report said.

Abhishek Baid, a third-generation diamonds trader in India, told Bloomberg that differentiating diamonds of varying origins on a large scale will be impossible.

India is still exporting polished Russian diamonds to the United States to fill stock that was ordered before the US sanctions were announced against Alrosa, but that supply will run out by the first week of June, according to Shah.

De Beers, the world's second major diamond provider, will find it very difficult to try to bring on any new production of diamonds and supply to the market, the company's CEO Bruce Cleaver told Bloomberg.

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US, Swiss Defense Officials Discuss Sale of F-35 Jets, Patriot Systems - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks met with Swiss Minister of Defense Viola Amherd and discussed the sale of 36 F-35A aircraft and five Patriot missile systems to Switzerland, Pentagon spokesperson Eric Pahon said on Friday.

"Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr. Kathleen Hicks met today with Federal Councilor Viola Amherd, Switzerland's Head of the Federal Department of Defense, Civil Protection, and Sport (DDPS) to discuss the changing security landscape in Europe," Pahon said in a statement.

"Deputy Secretary Hicks reiterated strong US support for the sale of 36 F-35A aircraft and five Patriot missile systems to Switzerland."

The two defense officials also discussed efforts to deepen cooperation between the two countries on cyber security and exchanged views on ways to tackle climate change in order to boost national security, the statement said.

In June 2021, Switzerland chose Lockheed Martin to supply 36 F-35 aircraft in a \$5.5 billion deal. The deal with US defense contractor Raytheon to purchase five Patriot surface-to-air missile systems is worth \$2.1 billion.

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US Diplomat Meets With Olympian Brittney Griner During Moscow Court Hearing - State Dept.



WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - A consular officer from the US embassy in Russia had a chance to meet with Olympic gold medalist Brittney Griner during a court hearing on Moscow and can confirm she is doing well, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday.

"We are monitoring very closely this morning's court hearing in Moscow. I can confirm that a consular officer at our embassy in Moscow was able to speak to her on the margins of the hearing," Price said during a press briefing. "The officer was able to confirm that Brittney Griner is doing as well as can be expected under what can only be described as exceedingly difficult circumstances."

Earlier on Friday, a Russian court ruled that Griner's detention will be extended until June 18 while her case is being investigated.

Griner was detained at a Moscow airport on February 18 after a police dog alerted officers to vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage.

The Biden administration has said it considers Griner to be wrongfully detained in Russia.

Griner was playing for the Russian basketball club UMMC Yekaterinburg during the off-season at the Women's National Basketball Association in the United States.

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Trudeau Welcomes Pope's Plans to Visit Canada, Deliver Apology to Indigenous People  
WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Friday he is pleased that Pope Francis intends to travel to Canada to offer a long-awaited apology to its indigenous people for the atrocities inflicted on their children by the Catholic Church in residential schools.

"I welcome the news of His Holiness Pope Francis' visit to Canada this summer to formally deliver the Roman Catholic Church's apology for its role in operating residential schools that caused lasting pain and suffering to Indigenous Peoples in this country," Trudeau said. "His Holiness' upcoming visit would not be possible without the bravery and determination of the Survivors, Indigenous leaders, and youth who shared their stories."

Last month, Pope Francis met with representatives from the First Nations, Inuit, and Metis at the Vatican in Rome where he apologized.

Trudeau said a formal in-person apology in Canada from the Roman Catholic Church to survivors and their families would be very important.

"This would be an important – and necessary – step for the Roman Catholic Church to continue engaging in dialogue with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis in order to advance meaningful reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples in our country," Trudeau continued. "For far too long, this has been a burden carried by Indigenous Peoples alone. I encourage all Canadians to watch this historic moment and reflect on the impacts of colonialism."

Canada's Indigenous leaders, people and survivors, had, for decades, been demanding an apology from the Catholic Church for the range of widespread abuses, physical, sexual, emotional and psychological. Between the late 1880s through to the 1990s, the Canadian government operated government-funded, primarily Church-run, compulsory boarding schools

that a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission described as a system of cultural genocide. An estimated 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to these residential facilities. The Catholic Church operated almost three quarters of the schools. The last school is said to have closed in 1996.

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Biden Speaks to Swedish, Finnish Leaders Amid Push to Join NATO - White House

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden spoke with Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson and Finnish President Sauli Niinisto on Friday, the White House said, as cited in a pool report.

"President Biden held a secure call this morning with Prime Minister Andersson of Sweden and President Niinistö of Finland from 9:50 AM– 10:27 AM EDT [13:50-14:27 GMT]," the White House said.

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US Consumer Sentiment at Near Decade Lows Amid Choking Inflation - UMich Survey

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US consumer sentiment has fallen to near decade lows as soaring prices put a chokehold on buying in an economy dominated by daily purchases, the University of Michigan (UMich) said on Friday as it published the latest results of its closely-followed consumer poll.

"Consumers' assessment of their current financial situation relative to a year ago is at its lowest reading since 2013, with 36% of consumers attributing their negative assessment to inflation," UMich Surveys of Consumers Director Joanne Hsu said as the reading for the Consumer Index Sentiment came in at 59.1 points.

Aside from everyday purchases, buying conditions for bigger-ticket durable items reached lows since UMich began its monthly surveys in 1978, Hsu said.

"These declines were broad based--for current economic conditions as well as consumer expectations, and visible across income, age, education, geography, and political affiliation--continuing the general downward trend in sentiment over the past year," she added. After contracting 3.5% in 2020 from disruptions forced by the coronavirus pandemic measures, the US economy expanded by 5.7% in 2021, growing at its fastest pace since 1982. But inflation has grown just as fast as the economy and faster. The Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, an inflation indicator closely followed by the Fed, rose by 5.8% in the year to December and 6.6% in the 12 months to March. Both readings reflected the fastest growth since the 1980s. The Consumer Price Index and the Producer Price Index, two other key gauges for inflation, rose 8.3% and 11%, respectively, in the year to April.

The surfeit in inflation has unnerved the Federal Reserve, which has a tolerance of 2% per year for price growth. The central bank has already raised rates back to back in March and May, the first time since the pandemic. It has also indicated that a total of seven rate hikes - the maximum allowable under the central bank's calendar of meetings this year - were on slot for 2022.

The Federal Reserve has said more interest rate adjustments could follow in 2023 until a return to the 2% inflation target is achieved.

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**Austin Speaks to Shoigu for First Time Since Russia Began Operation in Ukraine - Pentagon**

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin spoke on Friday with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu for the first time since February 18 and called for a ceasefire in Ukraine, spokesman John Kirby said.

"On May 13, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu for the first time since February 18," Kirby said in a statement. "Secretary Austin urged an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication."

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**Russia Plans to Activate Biological Weapons Convention to Probe Ukraine Biolabs - Nebenzia**

UNITED NATIONS, May 13 (Sputnik) - Russia plans to activate Articles 5 and 6 of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) to investigate the bio-laboratories in Ukraine, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said during the UN Security Council meeting on Friday.

"We have already accumulated lots of materials that directly indicate that the United States and Ukraine are violating the BWC. We continue to collect these materials and analyze them," Nebenzia said. "Given that the American party refuses to engage in any constructive discussion on this subject, we plane to utilize the mechanisms stipulated in Articles 5 and 6 of the BWC." Nebenzia noted that as soon as all the necessary the materials are collected, Russia will present them to the United Nations for investigation.

Article 5 of the BWC stipulates that "The states, parties to this Convention, undertake to consult one another and to co-operate in solving any problems which may arise in relation to the objective of, or in the application of the provisions of, the Convention. Consultation and co-operation pursuant to this Article may also be undertaken through appropriate international procedures within the framework of the United Nations and in accordance with its Charter."

Article 6 says "Any state party to this Convention, which finds that any other state party is acting in breach of obligations deriving from the provisions of the Convention, may lodge a complaint with the Security Council of the United Nations. Such a complaint should include all possible



evidence confirming its validity, as well as a request for its consideration by the Security Council."